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ABSTRACT

Principals are increasingly being held accountable for student achievement in the public schools, but there are many questions about how to assess principals' achievement. There are many problems with using the results of standardized testing to assess the achievement of principals. Feedback from teachers appears to be a good way to assess the effectiveness of principals. It is also possible to assess the role of the principal with regard to public relations through questionnaires completed by teachers and members of the public. What teachers, parents, and the public desire in a quality school curriculum should be determined though carefully designed questionnaires. The principal may then be assessed according to his or her leadership in implementing this curriculum. There should also be opportunities for principals to assess themselves. Their self-assessments, other evaluations, and creative thinking should be the basis for planning by the principal. (SLD)

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Assessment of School Principal Achievement

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ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL ACHIEVEMENT

Principals are being held increasingly accountable for student achievement in the pubic schools. With state mandated tests being used to measure learner achievement, what role does the principal play in fostering achievement? A more pressing inherent problem is how to measure the achievement of the school principal. Which criteria may then be used?

Student Achievement and Principal Progress

When state mandated test results come back from students, how may the principal reveal achievement or lack thereof? Teachers do the actual teaching in the classroom, and yet the principal is usually considered to be the building supervisor of instruction. It appears that teachers and principals interact when providing teaching and learning situations for students. The principal may do the following, among others, to improve the quality of instruction:

1. make observational visits to classrooms and then assesses with the involved teacher the quality of instruction. Assessment should be done in terms of quality criteria, such as
   a) the teacher secures and maintains student interest in learning.
   b) the teacher assists students to attach meaning and understanding to what is being learned.
   c) the teacher provides learnings using n appropriate sequence.
   d) the teacher provides adequately for students of different achievement levels.
   e) the teacher allows ample time for student questions in ongoing lessons and units of study (Ediger, 1986, 12-14).

2. provides for in service education for teachers including workshops, training programs, and faculty meetings devoted to curriculum improvement. Inservice education should be based upon
   a) needs of teachers, such as in helping students to do critical thinking.
   b) newly emphasized trends, such as teaching students effectively so that state mandated standards are being met. Teaching toward newly implemented state mandates may be new to teachers and assistance must be given here. Teaching mini-lessons or doing demonstration teaching my then be in the offing in the workshop.
   c) preparation of students to take state mandated tests (See Ediger, 2000, 173-178).
3. assumes leadership roles in dealing with discipline problems, positively, in the school/classroom setting. Improved student behavior is then in evidence in the classroom.

The above named items may be assessed by teachers using a five point scale. Feedback needs to be provided to the principal on the effectiveness of his/her work. A genuine desire to improve should be an end result.

Public Relations and the School Principal

A very salient role of the principal is to provide for quality public relations in school and in society. Thus, the principal

1. needs to be a caring person.
2. needs to shoulder and complete responsibilities.
3. needs to be polite and kind to others.
4. needs to be a good listener.
5. needs to work well with teachers, support personnel, and the lay public (Ediger, 1999, Chapter Seven).
6. needs to develop an effective means of communicating with the lay pubic. Quality communication must go beyond open house, parent/teacher organizations, and meeting with the lay people during coffee time. Thus radio, TV, and newspaper articles reporting on what classrooms are accomplishing as well as needs of the school should be communicated clearly and positively.
7. needs to report the objectives of the school to different publics and in diverse ways.
8. needs to develop and maintain a Web site which communicates clearly, vital items pertaining to the local school. These items may include school schedules, and home work of students on different grade levels, among others.
9. needs to coordinate efforts such as parents/grandparents visiting school and being guests at noon time in the school cafeteria.
10. needs to plan and discuss long range goals in the public relations arena (See Ediger, 2000, 244-249).

The above named objectives may be sent to a representative sampling of teachers and lay people. These may be rated on a five point Likert scale. An open space needs to be provided for written comments from respondents. The feedback provided to the principal should make for continuous improvement in the public relations arena. Hostility, rudeness, dogmatism, and rigidity need to be eliminated and replaced with openness in communicating with the lay public.

The Principal and Student Test Results

The principal increasingly is being held accountable for student test results in a school building. These are state mandated tests whereby

there is a cut off point for successful student work. The author will discuss pros and cons in this vital issue. Reasons given for holding principals accountable for student school achievement are the following:

1. students are losing out if they do not do well in school and later in society. Failing schools cannot be accepted in society. The principal is the educational learner of the school and he/she must accept responsibility for what transpires there.

2. all students can learn and each needs to learn sophisticated knowledge which the better financed and successful school children are receiving. The principal needs to help teachers understand what it means to have all children learn.

3. test results indicate how well students are doing in school. A single test score from a stated mandated test reveals the quality of instruction. Principals need to help teachers understand and accept the importance of student test scores to reveal achievement.

4. there are too many excuses given for a low performing school. No excuses should be given for students not doing well in school. The principal needs to guide teachers to help students achieve optimally and not shirk this salient responsibility.

5. report cards issued will make comparisons among school districts and schools within a state. The principal needs to develop pride within teachers in wanting to be a part of the top schools in the state.

Fallacies involved in holding principals responsible for student achievement are the following:

1. there are too many variables involved here in that the principal plays only a small role in the total achievement of students in his/her school. The home, community, income levels in the environment, and the business world also play major roles in the achievement of students.

2. the school principal did not hire teachers and support personnel when he/she first arrived in the local school, and perhaps, had little to do with hiring practices after that. His/her influence then cannot be so strong as to be accountable for how well students achieve on mandated tests.

3. the principal is not close enough to students to advocate learning opportunities to achieve mandated objectives. Teachers are much closer to students and can diagnose and remediate that which needs correcting in the instructional arena.

4. the principal can inform and talk to teachers abut innovative procedures in teaching, but it is up to the teacher to implement these strategies of instruction. Forcing teaching strategies upon teachers to use would very much be counter productive.

5. the school principal is a leader in the school and needs to guide in releasing the creative energies of teachers to work for curriculum improvement. Democracy as a way of life should be stressed in the school setting, not autocratic rule (See Dewey, 1916).

Needs Assessment Programs and the Principal

A carefully designed questionnaire needs to be developed to survey what teachers, parents, and the lay public desire in a quality school curriculum for students. The criteria listed in the questionnaire need to be chosen with great care so that respondents may rate each on a five point scale.The following criteria are listed as an example:

1. basal textbooks should provide most of the learning activities for students.
2. leaning activities should be strongly teacher directed, with minimal student input.
3. reading as a way of learning for students should be used largely.
4. testing is a major way of finding out what students have learned.
5. much grammar should be taught to help students do a better job of writing.

Any of the five above enumerated items may be explained and clarified to respondents. The responses should be in separate categories for teachers, for parents, and for the general lay public. The responses should be machine scored and each category receiving an average rating from the five point scale. Also, the highest rating and the lowest rating should be listed for each category. Upon examining the information, the principal may notice what is desired from respondents. It behooves the principal then to implement the findings from the questionnaire. If the responses to the questionnaire do not harmonize with a developmentally developed curriculum, the principal may need to educate the respondents to accept a curriculum which makes provision for individual differences in terms of talents and abilities (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).

The principal may then be assessed in terms of being the leader of implementing results from a needs assessment questionnaire and/or its modification.

Principal Self Evaluation

There should be opportunities for principals to assess the self. The results may be shared with teachers and the superintendent of schools, or his/her assistant. By going over the self assessment with others, the principal's self evaluation may be illuminated and improved upon. The form used to evaluate the self may be in terms of numbered criteria such as the following:

1. I am considerate to teachers in whatever transpires in school.

2. I am available to teachers to assist with instructional problems.

3. I attempt to guide each referred student to me to adjust properly to life's situations.

4. I work in the direction of teachers having the tools and supplies to do a good job of teaching.

5. I inform teachers of new, desirable trends in teaching which guide optimal learner achievement in class and in the surrounding environment.

6. I make plans at the end of the previous school year as to what I want to accomplish in the new school year.

7. I modify those plans which are no longer feasible.

8. I work harmoniously with parents in attempting to obtain the best curriculum possible for their offspring.

9. I work together with support personnel to develop/maintain cordial, productive working conditions.

10. I maintain an open door policy in having the lay public come to my office for discussions and problem solving (See Education Week, January 31, 2001).

The principal may also wish to use an essay approach in self evaluation. Here the principal needs to meet the following criteria in writing the self evaluation essay:

1. complete sentences with agreement of subject and predicate.
2. accuracy in terms of what is being said.
3. correct spelling of words. The word processor with spell checkers is valuable in helping to spell words correctly.
4. ideas written are focused toward a definite audience.
5. sequence of sentences and paragraphs are coherent.

Making Plans for the New School Year

Based on assessment results and upon critical/creative thinking, the principal needs to develop plans for the oncoming school year. New, vitalized hopes and aspirations must be in the offing. The principal needs to view life as a series of challenges which bring out the best within the self. Hurdling these problems can make for growth, development, and learning. Overcoming feelings of frustration and defeat are paramount. A feeling of optimism needs to prevail in that negative situations can change to the positive with a problem solving philosophy. Insurmountable obstacles have been overcome by those principals who view administrative work as problem solving. Which plans, in part, may a school principal make for the new school year?

1. Improving school attendance.Student absences do hinder academic and school work achievement. Otherwise the teacher may need to spend a considerable amount of time in helping students make

up the lessons missed from being absent. Rather, the teacher should be able to focus on planning and implementing new experiences, sequential for all learners.

2. improving promptness in school attendance. Tardiness disrupts others when the late comer enters the classroom. Tardy students lose out on learnings presented.

3. assisting teachers to use desirable criteria while teaching students such as actively engaging the latter with meaningful and purposeful activities and experiences.

4. providing teachers with adequate materials of instruction so that each student is helped to attain as optimally as possible.

5. working toward better schools with quality school buildings, teacher salaries, and holding down on class size (teacher/student ratio) to improve teaching and learning situations (See Ritchie, 1996).

A variety of methods and procedures may be used to assess the effectiveness of the professional school principal. Data obtained from assessment results need to be used to assist each student to achieve as optimally as possible in school and in society.

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